

The Influence of the Style of Superhero Film Series on Its Development

— Taking the Batman Series as an Example

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Abstract: Superhero-themed films have exploded in popularity in the film business in the year 2023. Superheroes are the primary subject of American comic books and the protagonists of fantasy works. Many comic book heroes have been adapted for the big screen, and different characters require varying degrees of adaptation of their source material in order to be presented to the public on the big screen. In the process of adaptation, the decision to adapt their style impacts the tone and direction of the film, as well as the plot. This research will examine the relationship between the style of each film in the Batman series, box office performance, and word-of-mouth to determine the effect of the style of different superhero films on their own evolution.

Keywords: Batman, superhero, comic book hero, box office

1. Introduction

Batman, an American superhero published by DC Comics who made his debut in Detective Comics #27 and was developed by Bill Finger and drawn by Bob Kane, is the first superhero in the history of comic books to lack superpowers.

Robin, a teenage sidekick, was introduced in 1940 as Wonderboy, Batman's sidekick. In addition to satisfying the needs of the teen market, the development of this character brought an additional depth to Batman and fostered a multidimensional portrayal. In succeeding decades, Batman stories included Batgirl, Alfred, and Leslie, who complemented and improved Batman's origins and personality. Batman has been interpreted in various ways over time. The character changed not just in appearance and equipment, but also in style. In the 1930s he was a gloomy detective, in the 1940s he was a mild-mannered dad, in the 1950s he was on a sci-fi adventure, and in the late 1960s the Batman TV series took an exaggeratedly humorous dramatic treatment, giving Batman a slapstick comical flair for decades after the TV series finished. Not until the 1980s did British Super comics begin to emphasize social realism. Frank Miller created the short comic book collections Batman: The Dark Knight Returns and Batman: The Year of the First under the influence of the left-wing realist comic book writers represented by Dennis O'Neil. The triumph of Tim Burton's live-action picture subsequently reintroduced Batman's mysterious tone. Today, the Batman narrative focuses more on the character's reality, and his adversaries have become more formidable, cunning, and

insane. His trauma is continually underlined, and as a result, he grows increasingly insecure and lonely, paranoid and gloomy.

This paper will evaluate the box office, successes, and reviews of each Batman film to analyze the current and future trajectory of the superhero film genre.

2. From Politics to Gothic

Along with the popularity of comics and the impact of the war on readers at the same time period, comic book publishers began to consider converting comic book characters into live-action films.

Batman, the first film in the Batman franchise, was released by Columbia Pictures in 1943 as a 260-minute collection of 15 short films, marking the first appearance of Batman and Robin in a live-action feature. Batman is a federal agent during World War II, whereas the antagonist is a Japanese agent.

In 1949, Columbia released a 263-minute, 15-episode short film titled *Batman and Robin*. The enemy reverted from a Japanese agent to a mere crook, and the film's aesthetic more closely resembled that of the period's comic books.

Batman was initially featured in a feature-length film in 1966, which cost \$1.54 million to produce. The film's style was totally consistent with the original comics of the day, including the clothing and conduct of the characters, as well as its illogical plot, which more or less reflected the comics of the era. However, the film still incorporates elements such as saving the United Nations Security Council and other mildly political components, indicating that the filmmakers at the time had not yet escaped the harsh political climate.

The 1966 debut of the Batman television series (120 episodes over three seasons) had a significant impact on the Batman character. Batman comic book circulation at the time was close to 900,000 copies, thanks to the success of the television series. In addition to reintroducing Alfred the Butler, the role of Batgirl and the show's comedic, exaggerated tone were introduced to the comics. Although both the television series and the comics were initially successful, the comic book style could not withstand the test of time, and the show was canceled after its third season in 1968, and the Batman comics once again lost popularity. The editor at the time remarked, "When the TV series was popular, I was informed that the comics had to be humorous; when the TV series fell out of favor, it was only logical that the comics would follow suit" [1].

Tim Burton directed his first film in 1986, with Steve Inglehart and Julie Hickson writing a conceptual outline and Sam Hamm writing the first draft of the script. From October 1988 to January 1989, the majority of the film was shot at Pinewood Studios in Iwerham, Buckinghamshire, England. Before the 1988 American Screenwriters Guild strike caused Hamm to quit, the production budget increased from \$30 million to \$48 million. It was rewritten by Warren Ska, Charles McKean, and Jonathan Grooms. *Batman* was released to widespread acclaim, smashed box office records, and won the 62nd Academy Award for Art Direction, grossing over \$410 million and ushering in a new age of contemporary superhero pictures. *Batman Returns* was a commercial success while retaining its original style, but Warner Bros. believed its performance could have been better. Therefore, they decided to move the series in a more mainstream direction. Tim Burton was replaced as the director of the new project by Joe Schumacher, but remained as the producer.

In September of 1994, when production on *Batman Forever* began, Schumacher had trouble connecting with Kilmer and Jones. The film was released on June 16, 1995, and was a commercial success, grossing over \$336 million worldwide and receiving three Academy Award nominations, but it received mixed reviews from critics, and to coin a phrase: if you can stomach the neon lights that make your eyes burn and the blasphemous superhero imagery, there is a bit of an enjoyable residue [2]. But it was also the film that began to move away from the specialized gothic genre and towards a more mainstream approach.

Warner Bros. commenced production on *Batman & Robin* immediately following the premiere of *Batman Forever* and insisted on a June 1997 release date. The 20th of June, 1997 saw the release of *Batman & Robin*, which got terrible reviews. Critics attacked the film's campy qualities and toy marketing, as well as Schumacher's satirical inclusion of homosexual innuendo. The film was monetarily successful, although not as much as the previous three movies, and it was the least popular of the live-action *Batman* films. *Batman & Robin* was also nominated for multiple Golden Acorn Awards and deemed the worst superhero film ever made. From the over-the-top character and scene design to the writing and production, which were a mess and have become synonymous with killing and bad business films, the film's victory was well-deserved. With such a production lineup, there is almost no limit to the variety of scenarios, yet almost all of the actors fail to capitalize on their skills and avoid their shortcomings, so delivering their worst performances [3].

3. A Return to Darkness and Society

Christopher Nolan, director and screenwriter, and David S. Goyer, another screenwriter, began working on "*Batman: The Riddle of Man*" in early 2003 with the intention of establishing a darker, more realistic tone where compassion and realism would serve as the film's foundation.

Batman: The Mystery of the Shadow was released on June 15, 2005 to critical and economic success. It earned an 85% "fresh" rating on Rotten Tomatoes, grossed \$374 million globally, and grossed \$48 million in its first week in 3,858 theaters in the United States and Canada. Fear is a persistent theme throughout the picture, and the tone of "*Batman: The Mystery of the Shadow*" is darker than previous installments, according to critics. The film was nominated for the 78th Academy Award for Cinematography, nominated for three BAFTAs, placed 81st on *Empire* magazine's list of the 500 finest films of all time, and as of June 2013, continues in the "Top 250" on the Internet Movie Database. After a decade of dust from *Batman and Robin*, director Christopher Nolan has returned the character of *Batman* to his original stature; compared to his previous style, the film is darker but more realistic than the original comic and magic, attempting to bring *Batman's* image in line with contemporary society. How *Bruce Wayne*, heir to a billion-dollar fortune, became *Batman's* dark savior has been artistically filled in and interpreted by the director. Moreover, the film abandons the overly exaggerated and retarded comic style of the previous episode and adopts a more rigorous realistic approach, such as the details of *Batman's* inexperience when he first began his career, as well as the antiquated, primitive, and wild nature of his initial chariot and battle suit, which all feel believable [4].

In light of "*Batman: The Riddle of Man's*" phenomenal box office performance in 2005, Warner decided to continue inviting writer-director Christopher Nolan to sit in "*Batman: The Dark Knight's*" sequel. It was released internationally in 2008 and grossed \$455,844 globally. As the culmination of the *Batman* series, the style of this work has completely shifted to that of a police procedural. Leaving aside the appearance of the characters and the stunning visuals, "*Batman: The Dark Knight*" focuses solely on the discussion of human nature and the criticism of the great contradictions arising from the class divide in contemporary society.

Nolan's "*Batman: The Dark Knight Rises*" is the concluding installment of his *Batman* trilogy. On July 20, 2012, the film was released in North America and the United Kingdom. The global ticket costs more than one trillion dollars. The film is a complete depiction of the rise of a hero: in the first half of the film, the first appearance of the master is portrayed as a long stay, reluctant to contact people, physically disabled more decadent image; the follow-up of the master's hospital also confirmed that the master's many years of fighting have caused a great burden on his body; he is not omnipotent; he is also human. There is a limit to what the human body can endure. Even the butler *Alfred's* persona is based on convincing the master to relinquish his "*Batman*" identity, have faith in the competence of the *Gotham* police, and enjoy his life as a wealthy young man and a "ordinary"

citizen. The "persuader" depiction. But the master's image of himself is that he has an obligation to become Batman in order to protect Gotham City; he has no dread of death or terror of great foes; and when he faces his opponents in the dark, he is confident that he can accomplish anything. This "self-perception" precipitated the rift between the master and his butler Alfred in the early part of the film, as well as Batman's most agonizing defeat to date.

The second half of the film describes the master's process of self-perception. In prison, the blind old man's chat with him teaches him that he should have the same dread for "death" and "failure" as regular people, and use this fear to bring their own power. After returning to Gotham City, he gave up his habit of fighting alone, regained the hope he had lost with Harvey Dent, rekindled his faith in "others," stepped under the light and joined forces with the police to combat the Bane group, and finally gave life to the concept of "Batman." The "Batman" notion is raised to the spiritual concept of Gotham City [5].

4. A Short Period of Cinematic Universe

The year 2016 has arrived, a time when Marvel, often regarded as DC's greatest rival, has managed to establish a distinct heroic image for its own film business. Although the films themselves have never been ranked higher than the Batman trilogy, the monetary value gained at the box office has resulted in enormous benefits for Marvel, such as: *The Avengers 2*, which was released in 2015, grossed \$1,405,413,868 globally, which was significantly more than DC's most popular film, *Batman: The Dark Knight*. This also motivated DC to establish their own superhero film universe.

Thus, after the 2013 release of *Superman: Man of Steel*, DC arranged for Zack Snyder to helm *Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice*, which was released simultaneously in the United States and mainland China on March 25, 2016 and grossed \$873 million worldwide.

Although the film cannot be considered a Batman series in the strictest sense, as it not only portrays the role of Batman, but also that of Superman, and it is precisely for this reason that the evaluation of the film is as follows: the film is serious narrative, visually dark, the story is ponderous and trivial, there are big scenes and bloody violence, as DC aspires to come out of a very different style than Marvel. The book is an excellent selection for the *Za* guide. Zack Schneider did inject these distinctive labels of his own into the DC universe, from Superman, Batman to Wonder Woman are dominated by dark colors, and are generally lacking in humor, opening and closing the mouth of the home country, continue to explore how superpowers should be restrained with such a serious subject matter, and full of all kinds of large-scale action. The visual scenes in the film are filled with large-scale destruction. In terms of the overall control of the film, Zack Schneider uses too much clumsy effort, attempting to inject seriousness into the characterisation but ultimately failing to do so, the insertion of many dreams and choppy editing failing to make the characters stand out but becoming more and more trivial, and the continuation of the dazzling bombastic special effects of *Superman: Body of Steel* is on the verge of becoming visual garbage [6].

5. New Life and Hope

Warner has rescheduled a new Batman solo film following a shift in Warner Studios' executive leadership. Previously directed by Zack Snyder, the picture was reallocated to the director. Matt Reeves has replaced Zack Schneider as the director of the Batman standalone feature. In 2021, the new Batman solo film was completed. The *New Batman* was released on March 4, 2022 in North America and has grossed \$751 million globally[7-8].

The film returns to the city where Batman resides: Gotham City's culture and the character's inner workings. Just like the reviews, the entire film is darker and more depressing, with deeper character development. The film seeks a fusion and breakthrough between the darkness and the commercial

genre, where the suspense and murder themes, which are important narrative vehicles for the film, are used in a fresh and retro manner, reminiscent of classic films like “The Silence of the Lambs” and “The Seven Deadly Sins” [9]. This version of Batman Bruce Wayne's persona is substantially different from Nolan's depiction, with a pimply face and beard, resembling a "broke wealthy kid," which is an externalization of his inner state as the Dark Knight. Simultaneously, the villain Riddler garnered notice. The film is more realistic, and the Riddler resembles a more realistic, divided, and threatening persona [10].

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, the style of superhero films leans more toward a reflection of the contemporary real world and society, and the audience expects the heroes to resemble real-world figures so that they can feel a greater sense of immersion when confronting the world they live in and the problems they must solve. The final component determining the style of the film is the director, whose control of the film is the most significant effect on the film's style. In the future, the style of the next Batman or the next phase of superhero films should be more realistic, producing a believable and thought-provoking science fiction worldview and revealing the appearance of these heroes behind their masks.

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